

HEALTHY UNIVERSITY – UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL LANCASHIRE, UNITED KINGDOM (UK)

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Summary

In 1995, the University of Central Lancashire became one of the first few universities to establish a Healthy University initiative – now one of the longest-running initiatives of its kind worldwide. This case study details the context, provides an overview of the initiative and uses food as a focus for illustrating how the whole system Healthy University approach has been developed and implemented in practice. It also introduces the UK Healthy Universities Network.

Keywords: Healthy University; health promoting university; healthy and sustainable food; whole system approach.

SETTING AND CONTEXT

In the UK, with 162 higher education institutions (HEIs) and almost 2.5 million students from increasingly diverse backgrounds and more than 378,000 staff (HESA, 2013; UUK, 2013), the higher education sector offers potential for the promotion of health and well-being. Not only are universities large and complex settings within which people learn, work, interact and socialise: they are also service providers; stakeholders and partners within their local communities; contexts within which many students undergo significant life transition, developing independence and life-skills; and ‘future shapers’ that play a key role in clarifying students’ and staff’s values and priorities and building tomorrow’s citizens, workers and decision-makers (Dooris et al., 2012). Investing in health and well-being in a university setting is therefore a win-win situation: healthy learners and healthy staff will increase levels of achievement, performance and productivity; and universities have the potential to make a significant contribution to long-term health improvement of the population.

The University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) is located in Preston in the North West of England and is committed to helping people from all walks of life to make the most of their potential. Having gained university status in 1992, it grew rapidly and now has around 30,000 students and 3,000 staff. In 1995, it became one of the first few universities in Europe to establish a Healthy University initiative. In doing so, it became

part of the wider movement for health promoting settings. Following evaluation of a two year pilot phase (Dooris, 2001), substantive funding for the Health Promoting University post was secured. Almost two decades later, the initiative is thriving and the university has embedded a commitment to health, well-being, sustainability and sustainable development within the core values of its Medium Term Strategy.

AIMS/OBJECTIVES

UCLan's Healthy University initiative aims:

- To integrate within the University's culture, processes and structures a commitment to health and to developing its health promoting potential.
- To promote the health and well-being of staff, students and the wider community.

In addition to these aims, it has six objectives which continue form a broad 'agenda for action':

- To integrate a commitment to health within the University's plans and policies.
- To support the healthy personal and social development of students.
- To develop the University as a supportive, empowering and healthy workplace.
- To create health promoting and sustainable physical environments.
- To increase understanding, knowledge and commitment to multi-disciplinary health promotion across all University schools and services.
- To support the promotion of sustainable health within the wider community.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN FEATURES

Co-ordinated from within the Healthy Settings Unit in UCLan's School of Health, the Healthy University works to a three year planning cycle overseen by a high-level Steering Group and reporting to the University's Safety, Health and Environment Committee and Senior Management Team. The Healthy University seeks to apply a whole system perspective to all of its work, involving relevant stakeholders and adopting a range of approaches and mechanisms. The Ottawa Charter has often been used to provide a framework to ensure that work is viewed from a range of different perspectives (i.e. policy, environment, service provision, skills development, community action). Whilst the Healthy University approach necessitates forging connections between different health topics, it can also be used as a means of ensuring that whole system thinking is applied to particular issues of concern. Food is one such issue that can usefully serve to illustrate this, as has been explored by Doherty et al. (2011).

Illustrative Focus: Health, Safe and Sustainable Food

Within UCLan, the Healthy University Steering Group decided to establish a Healthy, Safe and Sustainable Food Working Group. Set up in 2010, this group has ten members

from across the university, the students' union and external agencies. Initial meetings mapped and highlighted the positive practices that UCLan and the Students' Union already had in place, identified key areas for development, and forged linkages with other corporate agendas such as sustainable development. The group then developed a policy statement and a flexible and dynamic action plan, which forms part of the overall Healthy University Action Plan.

Links have been made with other UCLan groups in relation to research, curriculum and sustainable development. The group has been significant in bringing key actors together to manage the change process within the University – recognizing that shifts such as moving towards a healthier and more sustainable supply chain are ongoing and long-term. As part of its commitment to increase the provision of affordable, healthier, sustainable and ethical food, UCLan has undertaken consultation and training with chefs/catering staff and has reviewed menus, recipes, portion sizes and preparation methods – promoting 'meal deals' and increasing vegetarian options. It has also achieved Fair Trade status and, working with an external supplier, improvements have been made to provide clearer consumer information through appropriate labelling. In order to raise awareness of healthier eating, food safety and sustainable food messages have been integrated into menus and promotions. The students' union has also offered cooking demonstrations and an undergraduate student has researched students' behaviour and attitudes towards healthy eating for their dissertation. The working group has increased people's awareness of the range of different roles within the University and students' union, the potential for and complexity of change, and the practical constraints and challenges involved in implementing these changes.

Wider Developments: UK Healthy Universities Network

In 2006, UCLan set up an informal network of HEIs interested in developing and implementing the Healthy Universities approach. This was strengthened and expanded through means of a HEFCE-funded project 'Developing Leadership and Governance for Healthy Universities', resulting in the establishment of the UK Healthy Universities Network, jointly led by UCLan and Manchester Metropolitan University. The Network's vision states that 'a Healthy University aspires to create a learning environment and organisational culture that enhances the health, well-being and sustainability of its community and enables people to achieve their full potential.' Its website www.healthyuniversities.ac.uk includes an online toolkit comprising a self-review tool, guidance packages and case studies.

APPLICATION TO KEY PRINCIPLES OF HEALTH PROMOTION AND RELEVANT THEORY

Healthy Universities is one application of the settings approach. Kickbusch (1996: 5) suggests that this means adopting a salutogenic focus, 'shifting the focus from the

deficit model of disease to the health potentials inherent in the social and institutional settings of everyday life,' whilst Dooris (2005) proposes a conceptual framework characterised by an ecological model of health promotion, a systems perspective and a focus on whole system change.

Drawing on early work by Baric (1993), a conceptual model for Healthy Universities has been developed (Figure 1), which highlights the centrality of a whole university approach (Dooris et al., 2010). This is underpinned by health promotion principles such as empowerment, equity, participation, partnership and sustainability (Rootman et al., 2001) and describes how a university can facilitate coherent and joined-up action by working across three key focus areas (relating to the environment of the setting, the core business of the setting, and connections to the wider community).

The approach involves not only responding to and being driven by both public health and core business agendas, but also securing high-level leadership, engaging a wide range of stakeholders, and combining high visibility health-related projects with system-level organisation development. It also requires a proactive and systematic process that designates responsibilities and accountabilities; harnesses and connects health-related activities; assesses needs and capacities; sets priorities; implements and monitors progress against a delivery plan; conducts wider evaluation; and celebrates achievements (Dooris et al., 2010).

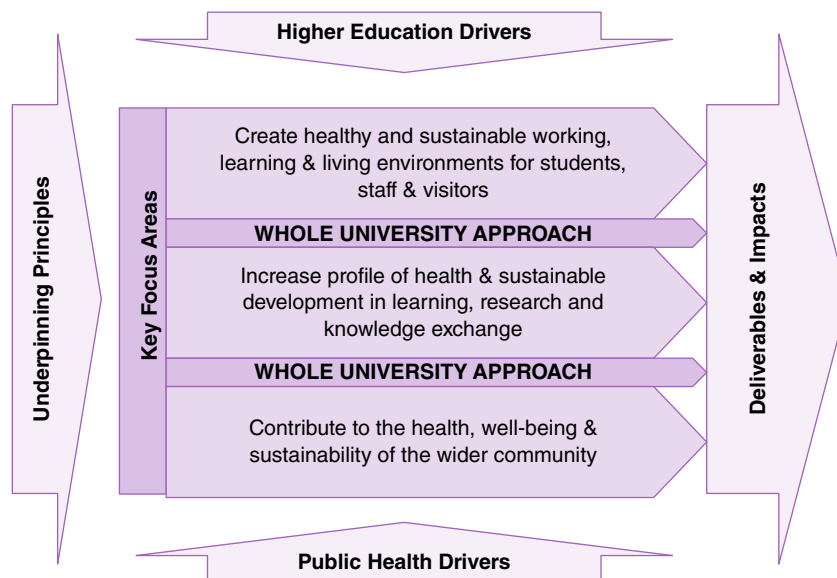


Figure 1 Healthy Universities - A Model for Conceptualising and Applying the Healthy Settings Approach to Higher Education

Source: Dooris et al. (2010)

KeyLinks

UCLan Healthy University

www.uclan.ac.uk/healthy_university/index.php

UK Healthy Universities Network home page

www.healthyuniversities.ac.uk

UK Healthy Universities Network Toolkit

www.healthyuniversities.ac.uk/toolkit

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